

Kyodan

Kyodan News Letter

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN JAPAN
CHRISTIAN CENTER
2,4 CHOME, GINZA, CHUO KU, TOKYO, JAPAN
Cable Address: Japankyodan Tokyo Telephone (561) 6131

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A LETTER FOR PEACE IN VIETNAM

TO THE CHURCHES AND THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The war in Vietnam has become a burden for all the peoples of the world. We Christians, in Japan, because we feel responsible for many acts against people of other countries in the past, want to pray for this problem and have been praying and working for a proper solution of this conflict. Three years ago over the signature of the then Moderator, Mr. Isamu Omura, the United Church of Christ in Japan sent to President Johnson a memorial seeking peace in Vietnam. Now, since January of this year the situation has so drastically changed that once more we must clearly present our thinking and we must make an appeal to all our brothers and sisters who are laboring for peace in Vietnam.

I. The judgement of the Government of the United States and of the personnel of the Department of Defense is that the fighting power of the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) is supported by the Communist bloc and by men and supplies from North Vietnam. However, even with the heavy bombing of North Vietnam the fighting power of the NLF is not weakened but can be said to be getting stronger.

It seems that in the public opinion of the people of the United States that the NLF can only be seen as a tool of North Vietnam. It is true that among the members of the NLF there are Communists and these people do have an important role to play. However, we cannot say that the NLF is only an organization of Communists. In January of this year a group of important political leaders of Saigon, really the intelligentsia, met and put forth a concrete plan for the ending of the war. They said that the NLF was mainly a gathering of non-communists and they also said that these policies were not controlled by Hanoi. We recognize that the character of the NLF is first a peoples movement.

All people are given the right of freedom, the right to live where they were born, the right to think their own thoughts, the right to choose the political structure for their country. This respect of freedom is a primary condition that precedes material and spiritual support. These people are choosing freedom over peace and they are saying that they will fight many years for this independence.

II. Even though the United States has used for several years, powerful military weapons the NLF has not been set back, the NLF is infiltrating, South Vietnam and we must realize that they are being helped by the South Vietnamese. This is being proved by the fact that men and weapons are being smuggled into the closely guarded city of Saigon. If you look at the opposite side it is said that America is not welcome by the people as protectors of liberty and democracy. Frankly speaking, it is said that a large percent of the people of Vietnam do not have good will toward the Americans and this trend seems to be on the increase.

In addition to this kind of condition, the problem with the military and the government of South Vietnam also speaks to our hearts. Senator Edward Kennedy after visiting Vietnam spoke in the United States Senate about corruption in the government of South Vietnam. We cannot simply say that all of this is the responsibility of the people of Vietnam. Behind this there exists the war, the continuing of the war, political and economic factors, out of this comes corruption. We must consider that one cause of this corruption is American aid and military power and it is difficult not to face this fact. One great moment that gives birth to corruption is during the course of military activity and the giving of aid.

III. We hear that the number of deaths of non-military people in this Vietnam war has exceeded 100,000 persons. It is said that over one-half of these deaths are children under 13 years of age. There is no reason that can be given to justify the killing of non-military people by napalm, phosphorous bombs, and ball bombs. The noblest humanism cannot atone for the lack of sympathy for the wounds of a small child.

God gives to the large nations and to the small nations, to the white man and to the man of any color the same freedom and rights. Our world has different ideologies but no one should suffer loss because of these differences, on the contrary we have the opportunity and possibility of building "a rich and plentiful world".

IV. These situations as outlined above are being published in detail in Japan--even the conservative people recognize that American public opinion is somewhat different. However, the government of Japan and the government of the United States hold the same opinion. It is said that when Mr. Katzenbach, of the State Department, went to Europe to seek aid for the dollar crisis, one of the causes of this crisis being the Vietnam war, the European countries promised cooperation but as a condition they sought an early termination of the war. Our Japanese government without even making a like request, that of terminating the war, cooperated in defending the American dollar. However, this does not mean that the people of Japan agree with the Vietnam war. This year, in the middle of January, opposing the entry of the nuclear air-craft carrier, Enterprise, into the port of Sasebo, students organized a resistance movement and in this cause shed their blood. Beginning with the citizens of Sasebo many people were critical of this student movement but at the same time gave support to the principle because they did not want Japan committed to the Vietnam war.

V. In the midst of these conditions, we Christians in Japan cannot help but feel deeply concerned over two areas:

(1) During the 2nd World War Japan invaded Vietnam and did great damage to the people of this country, moreover, because of various political conditions France was again given ruling powers over Vietnam. When we think of this as being the basic cause for the twenty years of war in Vietnam we Japanese feel a deep responsibility.

(2) The recent economic growth of Japan can be partly attributed to the fact that Japan has directly and indirectly benefited from this war. When we know that the people of Vietnam are suffering and dying we are deeply pained and cannot enjoy our comfortable living when we remember that it comes partly from these circumstances.

From the standpoint of faith, looking objectively at these trends we Japanese hope that the war can be terminated as soon as possible. However, it seems that the American government and the military want to secure a more advantageous military position before solving this problem or before entering into negotiations and they are working to that end. But looking at the situation in South Vietnam it is no longer possible to solve this problem by military force.

The Pope of the Roman Catholic Church and the General Secretary of the United Nations, U Thant, have been working to arrange talks for the cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam. At the end of last year (1967) Gwin Doi Chin, foreign affairs minister of North Vietnam, stated, "if there is an unconditional cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam, then peace discussions can be commenced." This gave great promise for the opening of a line of communication. However, when President Johnson in his New Year's message declared that this bombing pause would only be used to advantage by the North Vietnam army--the road to peace became farther away than ever before. We believe that this is really a sad state of affairs. We hope that the United States will begin an unconditional cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam and together with the NLF, whose power is already evident in South Vietnam and this power cannot be underestimated, will start negotiations to end this war.

We pray that your country (the United States of America) who lives according to the traditions prevalent in its founding, who has had deep insight into the providence of God who rules history, who with courage and humility has conscientiously faced this difficult problem, will be a nation that shows forth a light of hope for the destiny of the human race. We sincerely hope that the churches in your country may, in this problem, struggle to follow Jesus Christ who is the servant of all.

The United Church of Christ in Japan

鈴木正久

Masahisa Suzuki
Moderator

February 21, 1968

March 31, 1968, Moderator Suzuki will be the guest speaker at the opening service of the Peace Conference in Prague. After two days in Berlin, on the 11th of April he will fly to New York. From April 11th until May 19th he will be visiting Boards and Churches in the United States and Canada. This will be the Moderator's first visit to North America.

Rev. Otis Bell, an associate secretary of the Evangelism Committee and one of the editors of the Kyodan Newsletter will accompany the Moderator on the trip to the United States.

